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SELECTED POEMS

SELECTED POEMS

BY

LAURENCE HOUSMAN



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE following selections have been made, with but three exceptions, from four previous volumes now out of print—*Mendiant Rhymes*, *The Little Land*, *Rue*, and *Spikenard*. Except for the transfer of 'Love Importunate' and 'Easter Dawn' from the first to the last section, and the interpolation of new matter on pages 24, 26 and 82, the verses stand grouped in the order named. The dedication to *The Cloak of Friendship* has been included by the kind permission of Mr. John Murray.

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MENDICANT RHYMES

Poor rhymes a-begging came,
In vain I bade them go :
' Begone ! ' quoth I, ' you 're lame ! '
And, sad, they owned it so,—
Was that to say them no ?

The more by that same token
Each sought to be my guest,
' Our feet, ' said they, ' are broken ;
Thus far we 've limped our best.'
' Lie down, ' I said, ' and rest ! '

Such feet, and so much begging,
By such hard roads to boot,
Had made it weary legging :
The poorest fare would suit.
They entered and took root.

I set them by the ingle ;—
Poor cheer ! the fire was low
(Enough where one lives single
For one to roast the toe) :
Stirring, I made it glow.

Mendicant Rhymes

Then upon sorry faces
I turned at gaze to scan
What guests I had, what places
Had bred them, maid or man
And lo ! a gypsy clan !

Aliens and outlaws mostly,
A breed well used to tramp ;
But with them some stood ghostly,
And one, lit by the lamp,
Who bore a pastoral stamp.

Young Corin was his name ;
Beside him Chloë stood ;
Her cheek glowed red with shame,
And, hide it though she would,
All torn her dainty snood.

Ah, thicker far than water
The blood that in them ran :
She was a woodman's daughter,
And he a child of Pan :
Full well I knew the man !

‘Good folk,’ quoth I, ‘you’re foreign :
Here’s none I’d wish to know !
What do I care for Corin ?’
And Corin answered slow,
‘You cannot let me go !

Mendicant Rhymes

‘The oft-told rhymes of lovers
Are not the rhymes we know :
New dust the old dust covers,
Now with new things to show
We let the old song go !

‘So to the heart that hearkens
The ancient tune wears thin ;
Far heaven above him darkens,
Near grief becomes his kin :
He lets the new song in.’

Strangers ? It seemed they knew me
The frail, the halt, the blind !
So, sheltered, sang they to me,
Each as he had a mind,
While outside sang the wind.

Night passed : at break of day
I turned them out of doors.
‘Now must we go,’ quoth they,
‘To rest our aches and sores
At hearths less cold than yours.’

Oh, other hearths, I think,
Less cold the earth may show !
Yet, till the mountains shrink
And rivers cease to flow,
A-begging these shall go !

Corin and Chloë

CORIN AND CHLOE

Poor Chloe by the water cries,
‘Ah, Corin, let me go !
Another day, another way,
I will not say thee no !
Hast thou the will to do me ill,
And win me to my woe ?
I loved thee well, I was not wise :
Ah, Corin, let me go !’

Poor Corin by the water cries,
‘I cannot let thee go !
Thy tears and sighs inflame mine eyes
More than thy breasts of snow.
So wins my will to have its fill
On fears that in thee grow,—
Alas, for thee, alas for me,
I cannot let thee go !’

This is the way of man with may :
‘Ah, Corin let me go !’
Then blood must rise because she flies
From—what, she dares not know.

Corin and Chloē

‘Another day, another way !’—

She pleads her tale of woe;
And Corin by the water cries,
‘I cannot let you go !’

So all of you that be poor maids,

If ye would love poor men,
And in kind glades and closing shades
Would meet to part again,—
Keep down your sighs and show brave eyes,
Else you will come to woe,
When Corin by the water cries,
‘I cannot let you go !’

The Huntress

THE HUNTRESS

O HUNTRESS soul, with leash and thong
Hold thou the many-footed pack :
Hark, through the brake their clamorous
song
The mountains echo back !

And clear and far the notes are borne,
And up the ridges of the fells
A rumour runs with rising morn
That of the huntress tells ;

Till from the tangle of the brake
The startled quarry leaps to view,
And all the baying woodlands quake
Quick to thy loud halloo.

And lo, thy sovereign hand hath cast
Loose to the herd its high control,
And like a wind thy heart at last
Bends breathless to the goal.

The Huntress

And swift, and swift, from dale to hill,
Now hidden close, now clear to view,
On drives and strives the chase, and still
The huntress heart goes too ;

Till under hollow heats of day,
The hounds have rest ; and, at the
goal,
Weary they render up their prey
To thee, O huntress soul !

Young Bloods

YOUNG BLOODS

THE edge of night was dark and damp :
 Before the break of day,
We three stole from the empty camp,
 And followed to the fray.

Michael chose the sorrel,
 And John was for the bay ;
And, little loath to follow,
 I mounted on the grey.

Through the thick fern we stumbled on,
 Slow crept the morning light.
'We shall be whipped for this,' said John,
 'Or each be made a knight !'

Michael rode the sorrel,
 And John was on the bay ;
And, eager for the quarrel,
 I pricked upon the grey.

Low in the whins a first bird sung,
 By wood-ways fresh with green,
When through the fog that round them hung
 The sluggard foe was seen ;

Young Bloods

Their steeds stood all at tether,
We laughed, shook rein, and ran :
The three of us together
Made but a single man !

And one of us cried, Michael !
And one of us, Saint John !
But I cried, Saint Mary !
So fair to look upon.

Michael and John leaned out of Heaven,
And Mary gave the light,
When, all three lances even,
We broke them into flight.

The mists were close to blind them,
They were but mortal men ;
And we thundered hard behind them,
And shouted fit for ten.

But swift—for so God willed it—
The sun his beams arrayed,
And smote the world and filled it,
And lo—the flight was stayed !

And one of us cried, Michael !
And one of us, Saint John !
But I cried, Saint Mary !
So fair to look upon.

Young Bloods

Then saw we pacing at our side,
Three strangers passing fair;
And easy, easy went the stride
Of feet that trod on air:

Bright Bodies, how their raiment shone !
Their heads were lost in light.
'We shall be whipped for this !' said John,
'Or each be made a knight !'

On Lansdown Hill

ON LANSDOWN HILL

HERE Sir Bevil fell with his men,
The right hearts for the wrong cause :
Perished the pick of a county then,
For Charles, breaker of laws.
In a wrong fight fell a good knight :
So a good night to Sir Bevil !
Who gained his laurel in an ill quarrel,
And whose cause went to the devil.

Many a cause has gone to him
That's better there left sleeping :
But the man who gave for it life and limb
Earth holds in holier keeping.
Wrong has its say, and folly its day,
And high blood holds its revel :
But good, I'll trust, has charge of the dust
Of the men who fell with Sir Bevil.

Gentle was he, and fair, and free,
And a good knight newly knighted ;
And a good knight still he rests on the hill,
Now the rights that he wronged stand
righted.

On Lansdown Hill

Under the sky that saw him die
The old road runs level ;
And level laws have done for the cause
That was backed by the brave Sir Bevil.

I would rather, I vow, be as these that now
Have done with their noise and nonsense—
Good lives thrown down for the cause of a
crown,
Than be keeper of one king's conscience !
In a wrong fight fell a good knight :
So a good night to Sir Bevil !
Who won his laurel in an ill quarrel,
And whose cause went to the devil.

Over the hill as I came down,
 Across the flats where the peewits cry,
 I heard the drums through all the town
 Beat for the men that were to die.

Oh, blithely up the eastern street
 Looked in with me the morning sun,
 Up to the market-square where feet
 Went marching all like one.

And dark against the high town-hall
 The shadow of the shambles fell ;
 And clear beneath its gilded ball
 The town clock tolled their knell.

Came rumours of the distant farms,
 But from the townsfolk not a cry,
 Though wives with babes upon their arms
 Stared, and stood waiting by !

Oh, oft I come and oft I go,
 And see those roofs against the sky :—
 But not the place I used to know
 Where simple hearts beat high.

1685

Now like a wreck each homestead looks,
While on it sunlight falls in flood :
And all the peewits by the brooks
Are crying out of wasted blood !

The Settlers

THE SETTLERS

How green the earth, how blue the sky,
How pleasant all the days that pass,
Here where the British settlers lie
Beneath their cloaks of grass !

Here ancient peace resumes her round,
And rich from toil stand hill and plain ;
Men reap and store ; but they sleep sound,
The men who sowed the grain.

Hard to the plough their hands they put,
And wheresoe'er the soil had need
The furrow drove, and underfoot
They sowed themselves for seed.

Ah ! not like him whose hand made yield
The brazen kine with fiery breath,
And over all the Colchian field
Strewed far the seeds of death ;

Till, as day sank, awoke to war
The seedlings of the dragon's teeth,
And death ran multiplied once more
Across the hideous heath.

The Settlers

But rich in flocks be all these farms,
And fruitful be the fields which hide
Brave eyes that loved the light, and arms
That never clasped a bride!

O willing hearts turned quick to clay,
Glad lovers holding death in scorn,
Out of the lives ye cast away
The coming race is born.

Deus Noster Ignis Consumens

DEUS NOSTER IGNIS CONSUMENS

To Him be praise who made
Desire more fair than rest :
Better the prayer while prayed,
Than the attained bequest !
Man goes from strength to strength
Fresh with each draught of pain,
Only to fail at length
Of heights he could not gain.

The soul of live desire,
How shall it mate with dust ?
To whom was given fire,—
For ashes shall he lust ?
Man's tenure is but breath,
His flesh, a vesture worn :
Let him that fears not death
Fear not to rest unborn.

The crown entails the curse ;
Here all the fame that's won,
A harvest for the hearse,
Falls withered to the sun.
There, weary of reward,
The victor strips his wreath ;
There, sick with deaths, the sword
Sighs back into the sheath.

Two Songs

TWO SONGS

I

SLEEP lies in every cup
Of land or flower :
Look how the earth drains up
Her evening hour !

Each face, that once so laughed,
Now fain would lift
Lips to Life's sleeping-draught,
The goodlier gift.

Oh, whence this overflow,
This flood of rest ?
What vale of healing so
Unlocks her breast ?

What land, to give us right
Of refuge, yields
To the sharp scythes of light
Her poppied fields ?

Nay, wait ! our turn to make
Amends grows due :
Another day will break,
We must give too !

Two Songs

II

QUICK, come away, Beloved, from sight !
The heavens are tired of holding the night.
One by one all the stars burn low ;
New eyes are watching us : let us go !

Nay, but wait till the full dawn grows :
No blade of grass on the hillside knows !
Ah, but the stars will have told the dew,
And the dew will tell where our feet brush
through.

If we had wings we would rise and rise,
Follow the stars when they close their eyes.
One by one all the stars burn low :
New eyes are watching us : let us go !

The Followers

THE FOLLOWERS

IN the morning early,
Laughter on his lips,
Through the dewdrops pearly
Love comes and sips.

After him the herds are,
After him the bees,
After him the birds are
Tuning in the trees.

But when in the hollows
Your feet trip the dew,
Love, he ups and follows :
He goes after you !

I Bid Thee, Dear!

I BID THEE, DEAR!

I BID thee, dear, amend thy looks !
For thou hast beauty far more high
Than man may claim till all the brooks
And seas of love run dry.

I bid thee, dear, abate the charm
Which makes thee like a star to shine !
Lest, if I win such wealth, I harm
Its worth by wants like mine.

I bid thee, dear, dethrone thy heart,
If thou wouldst ever mate with me !
In such a heaven I have no part
Till I immortal be !

Nay, dear, I bid thee alter nought !
Ah, no ! far rather let me die :
Let not Creation's topmost thought
Be changed for such as I !

Comrades

COMRADES

WE watched the heavens about us bend,

The starlit waters slept hard by.

‘Doubt not,’ I said, ‘the gods descend

By stealth from yonder sky.

‘Doubt not that they, though dwelling far,

Come to renew the ancient bond :

See, in those waters, how each star

Shapes like a pilgrim’s wand.

‘Who knows how close, perchance, hath
brushed

In field or street some form divine?’

I ceased: the quick blood through me
rushed:

A hand was laid on mine.

And in the dark I turned to see

Turn quick on mine a startled face,

And eyes that strove to read in me

The secret of my race!

Close overhead among dark boughs

The nightingale his burden dropt:

And under those dear lifted brows

The deep inquiry stopt.

Comrades

No word was said, no sign was given :
 Silent, we heard the waters flow.
Ah, friend ! had I the gift of heaven,
 Should I have let you go ?

The Cloak of Friendship

THE CLOAK OF FRIENDSHIP

O moving friends, that unrevealed,
Through dusk, or dark, or break of day,
Bring seed to bless the common field
Where the worn ploughshare lifts the
clay;

Who stand as shadows of a light
More fair than man hath wit to see,
Come from your homes of day and night
And lay the covering cloak on me!

And in that shelter let me share
The gifts of time which yet remain,
Ye that gave warmth and light and air,
And sought no recompense again.

So shall the friends I have not wronged
Take root within my life and grow,—
This dust of life where once belonged
The hearts I sought to know.

Envoy

ENVOY

Go: wait not on my call!
I am but a voice, a cry:
Wherever your foot may fall
On silence, there shall I lie.

Day after day will come:
Care not to think of me!
Close at your side, dear, dumb,
I, that have been, shall be!

Dumb at the doors of your heart:
Oh, wonder, world without end!—
Say, when at last we part,
Here you have found a friend.

The House-Builder

THE HOUSE-BUILDER

If the Lord build not the house,
Lost is their labour that build it ;
If the Lord keep not the city,
Waketh the watchman in vain.
Idly at cock-crow ye rouse
For toil till your hand hath fulfilled it ;
Breaking of bread is but pity,
Soon shall ye hunger again.

Sleep, ye shall sleep ; but within you
Dwelleth the gift of the Lord :
Ye shall have sons for reward,
And your seed upon earth shall continue.

So shall the breed of your race
Be as shafts in the hand of a giant ;
Happy is he and immortal
Whose quiver is filled with their breath :
He, unashamed of face,
Stands to the foeman defiant,
Comes undismayed to the portal
Dark with the shadow of death.

The House-Builder

Sleep, ye shall sleep, but within you
Dwelleth the gift of the Lord :
Ye shall have sons for reward,
And your seed upon earth shall continue.

The Fellow-Travellers

THE FELLOW-TRAVELLERS

FELLOW-TRAVELLERS here with me,
Loose for good each other's loads !
Here we come to the cross-roads :
Here must parting be.

Where will you five be to-night ?
Where shall I ? We little know.
Loosed from you, I let you go
Utterly from sight.

Far away go taste, and touch,
Far go sight, and sound, and smell !
Fellow-travellers, fare you well,—
You I loved so much !

Once, Always

ONCE, ALWAYS

IF once, ere I died,
Ere the day laughed without me ;
I had you by my side
With your dear arms about me,
Then the bliss would run on like a tune
For both hearts to remember ;
Then I should be with you in June,
You with me in December.

Song

SONG

IN a well, a well of flowers,
Deep with dewdrops, lay me by !
Falling leaves shall tell the hours,
And a pansy at each eye
Shut my sorrow from the sky !
Since for thee my sweetness went,
Earth in earth I wish to lie :
There above my discontent
Though the flowers give forth their scent,
None's to tell how sweet was I !
How sweet was I !

There to hide what Love forgets,
Little kindnesses will come ;—
From my heart grow violets,
Whence the morning bee bears home
Sweets to fill the honeycomb.
But so still will I stay laid,
Coming you shall find hard by
Basking lizards, unafraid
Of a thing so all unmade,
Though for thee a maid was I.
A maid was I !

Annus Mirabilis (1902)

ANNUS MIRABILIS (1902)

DAYLIGHT was down, and up the cool
Bare heaven the moon, o'er roof and elm,
Daughter of dusk most wonderful,
Went mounting to her realm :
And night was only half begun
Round Edwardes Square in Kensington.

A Sabbath-calm possessed her face,
An even glow her bosom filled ;
High in her solitary place
The huntress-heart was stilled :
With bow and arrows all laid down
She stood and looked on London town.

Nay, how can sight of us give rest
To that far-travelled heart, or draw
The musings of that tranquil breast ?
I thought—and gazing, saw
Far up above me, high, oh, high,
From south to north a heron fly !

Annus Mirabilis (1902)

Oh, swiftly answered ! yonder flew
The wings of freedom and of hope !
Little of London town he knew,
The far horizon was his scope.
High up he sails, and sees beneath
The glimmering ponds of Hampstead Heath,

Hendon, and further out afield
Low water-meads are in his ken,
And lonely pools by Harrow Weald,
And solitudes unloved of men,
Where he his fisher's spear dips down :
Little he knows of London town.

So small, with all its miles of sin,
Is London to the grey-winged bird.
A cuckoo called at Lincoln's Inn
Last April ; in Soho was heard
The missel-thrush with throat of glee,
And nightingales at Battersea !

The God at Play

THE GOD AT PLAY

(On a child playing by the water)

IN the hollow of his hand
My child holds a little land :
Lord of all that land is he !
There are hills and meadows green,
There a river meets the sea ;
And between,
On a rock an island town
Takes its stand,
Looking down
Over all the pleasant lea.
And its ramparts are the band
Of a crown,
Steeple-crested, gemmed and grand,
Lording all that little land,
So fair to see
In my child's hand !

Out to sea the fighting fleets,—
Round the walls the fighting men
Bannered go.
Faint from inland fold and pen

The God at Play

White flock bleats
And cattle low :
Autumn hoards, and summer heaps,
Ploughman ploughs, and reaper reaps,
Over slaggard winter leaps
Light-foot spring ;
Peace is priest, and Plenty king,
Since a kind god wills it so,—
So to be from long ago,
In this lazy little land,
 So fair to see
In my child's hand !

Little land is all asleep,
Resting at the Sabbath-bell :
High upon its rocky perch,
Grounded deep,
Goes the gadding town to church,—
Goes to pray in pious speech,
Goes to let the preacher preach :
And as there folk sit and nod,
All the while a tired god
Lets the river rise and rise,
Sets the shoreward tide to flow
Up the land in soft surprise :
Ah, heigho !
How the happy sheepfolds go,
How the farms like islands show !
How of all the little land
Nothing soon is left to stand

The God at Play

Save the town, a place of woe,—
Spired crown and rampart-band:
This,—of all the little land
 So fair to see
In my child's hand !

The City of Sleep

THE CITY OF SLEEP

MANIKIN, maker of dreams,
Came to the city of sleep :
The watch was on guard, and the gates
 were barred,
And the moat was deep.

‘ Who is on my side, who ? ’
Moonbeams rose in a row :
He tuned them loud betwixt town and cloud
 But his voice was low.

He sang a song of the moon
 For loan of her silver beams ;
Misty and fair, and afloat in air,
 Lay the ladder of dreams.

He harped by river and hill ;
 And the river forgot to flow,
And the wind in the grass forgot to pass,
 And the grass to grow.

He harped to the heart of earth
 Where honey in hive lies sweet :
And that sound leapt through the gates,
 and crept
Through the silent street.

The City of Sleep

Manikin, maker of dreams,
He pursed his lips to pipe :
And the strange and the new grew near and
true,
For the time was ripe.

He piped to the hearts of men :
And dreamers rose up straight,
To drift unbarred by the drowsy guard,
And beyond the gate.

He piped the dream of the maid :
And her heart was up and away ;
And fast it beat and hurried her feet
To the gates of day.

He piped the dream of the mother,
The cry of her babe for food :
And she rose from rest to give it the breast
And that was good !

He piped the dream of the child :
And into its hands and feet
Came tunes to play of the live-long day ;
And that was sweet !

He piped to the heart of youth :
And the heart of youth had sight
Of love to be won, and a race to run ;
And that was right !

The City of Sleep

He piped the song of age :
And that was a far-off song,—
When life made haste and the mouth could
taste :—
But that was wrong !

Manikin, maker of dreams,
Had piped himself to sleep :
The watch was on guard, and the gates
were barred,
And the moat was deep !

The Elfin Bride

THE ELFIN BRIDE

ACROSS the land, along the waste
That lies before the town,
A long procession, laggard-paced,
Of woods came marching down.

‘A far way off we see she comes!’ the happy
people cried;
And up within the steeple, how the bells
rang for the Bride!

‘She’s clothed in white, she wears a ring;
And oh, she shines like gold!
So red and gold and white a thing
Did any before behold?’

To kiss her feet the flood grew full, and
every gate flew wide,
And all the bells ran ringing down the hill
to meet the Bride!

Amid the scarlet of her lips
The laughter buds and brims;
And up the hill, as up she trips,
The royal river swims.

Her hair’s a golden lattice blown out at
either side,
And back the bells come ringing up the hill
to bring the Bride.

The Elfin Bride

The king within his palace
Leaped up from off his throne,
And her lips were like a chalice
When he set them to his own.

‘And you, my Love beloved,’ he cried, but
at the word grew dumb.
‘Have come, Beloved !’ the bells replied,
‘Have come, have come, have come !’

She turned about, she beckoned back,
The wild-wood with her eyes ;
The trees stood still upon the track,
The river ceased to rise.

‘Go back,’ she said, ‘dear kinsmen, and
range away at will !’
And water-flood and wild-wood went
thundering down the hill.

Up over roof and rafter
She heard the iron birds
Tongue out, and fell from laughter
To little lisping words :

‘And I, my Love beloved,’ she cried, and
then joy held her dumb.
‘Have come, Beloved !’ the bells replied,
‘Have come, have come, have come !’

The Death of St. Christopher

THE DEATH OF ST. CHRISTOPHER

CHRISTOPHER, who bore our Lord
On his shoulder through the ford,
After years (his great reward)

One glad day lay down to die.
From his body, limb by limb,
Labour he put off from him,
Till he heard a passer-by
Stand before the ford and cry.

When he heard the summons sound,
Christopher rose up from ground ;
Forth he went on duty bound,

Murmuring : ' Lest I work amiss,
Christ must give me strength for this :
This my latest labour is ! '

When he reached the ford at length,
Spake the Voice of all his bliss,
Saying, ' Christ shall give thee strength ! '

Humble, bowed, and very faint,
At His Feet fell down the Saint,
At His Feet fell down to pray,
' Lord, I have not strength to-day,
Thou must go some other way !
These old limbs can lift no more
That dread weight which once they bore.'

The Death of St. Christopher

In his face the Holy Child
Looked and smiled ;
And His Voice grew full and wide,
Many waters multiplied,
Saying : ‘Christopher, let be !
Since thou once didst carry Me,
I am come to carry thee.’

Very gently from his knees
Lifted him the Prince of Peace ;
Wonderful and Counsellor,
In His Hands the Saint He bore ;
He, the everlasting Lord,
Carried him across the ford.

Underneath, a level road
All the trodden waters flowed ;
Not a wave was dispossessed
That the Heavenly Bearer pressed,
With the Saint upon His Breast.
‘When,’ said He, ‘My weight did hurt,
Thou My beast of burden wert.
Now for thee, My child and lamb,
I the Beast of burden am.’

Cupid and Christ

CUPID AND CHRIST

QUICK came Cupid near to Christ,
At His Feet laid down his bow :
'See, Thy Love hath all sufficed !
Tempered in its heat and glow
Mortal hearts grow fired and iced :
Blunted, now, my weapons show.
Take my arrows, let me go !
Vainly now were hearts enticed.'
Christ said, 'No !

'Take thine arrows, take them up !
From My Feet take up thy bow !
All that thou hast doffed, now dup !
Little will My people know
How My Love hath drained their cup.
Shoot thine arrows, let them go !
On the hearts I cherish so
Thou mayst yet break fast and sup.'
Cried Cupid, 'No !'

'Ah !' spake Christ, 'and shall their
shame
So make short thy little day ?
While I wait 'tis all the same :
If they yet can make thee gay,

Cupid and Christ

Have thy pleasure, play thy game !
Little wounds shall lead the way
Where, at last, My Wounds may stay :
Flickering sparks may kindle flame.
Run, and play !'

Cupid, as the Other bade,
Took his arrows back, and played.
Every arrow that he sends
Mars a heart the Other mends !
But, ere forth upon that raid,
Once his heart on Christ's he laid,
Murmuring yet half-afraid :
' After, when the playing ends,
When grow well the wounds I 've made,—
We 'll be friends ? '

Bonds

BONDS

As a stream that runs to sea
Ever by its banks is led,
And by windings shepherded ;
So in bonds though bound I be,
I through limits reach to Thee.

These dear bonds wherein I chafe,
Wishing, 'Would that I were free !'
These it is which hold me safe,
Bringing me at last to Thee,
As the stream is brought to sea.

Penning it from side to side,
Shepherding its little streams,
Every bank a barrier seems :
Yet the stream would soon be dried
If the channel were too wide.

Here, fast bound by bank and fence,
Where I have not space to spread,
Still my body, chafed by sense,
Feels a spirit cross its bed,
As a stream goes current-led.

Bonds

Human minds so move about,
Only if fenced round with doubt ;
Only if denied their grasp
Gain the everlasting clasp.
Only streams which fettered be
Fret their way at last to sea.

So, with limits for my guide,
Safe, I shall not wander wide ;
But, where we are meant to meet,
Find in Thee the Life denied :
Falling low shall kiss Thy Feet,
Reaching far shall touch Thy Side.

Advocatus Diaboli

ADVOCATUS DIABOLI

You are the Saint, the sinner I ;
Yet both of us come here to die.
You did the right, and I the wrong,
I was the weak, and you the strong ;
Yet, at our two extremes, we doff
Not much with this our taking off :
Diversely we learn not to grieve
For relics of the life we leave.
If distaste for the world were all
Man need acquire,—I, in my fall,
Have found as good a way to learn
As you the vanities you spurn.
I have gone through, with mother wit,
And tested all the cheats of it :
You gave your judgment at hearsay,
And passed by on the other way ;
Forgetting, giving God His due,
You owed the Devil a duty too,—
The mere endeavour to be first
Exact about the thing you cursed !
With a too hungry ear you gleaned
God's ipse dixit on the fiend,
And cursed with sanctimonious awe
The features which you never saw.

Advocatus Diaboli

Horns, hoofs, a tail, wings like a bat,—
Ex parte statements such as that,
Are fit description, you aver,
For bright down-fallen Lucifer !
Yet I might tell you other things
Of the far-shadowing of his wings ;
Light's a strong thing, yet darkness is
The nature of the Infinities.
Maybe light conquers where it pries,
But, where it cannot, darkness lies ;
And if God is the Truth, the Light,
Satan is yet the Truth, the Night !

You are the strong, and I the weak,
Yet both have gained the goal we seek,
Brought by our Gods at this last hour
To frustrate the resisting power ;
You, to reject the power of Hell,
I, to reject your Godhead. Well,
I am the weak, you are the strong :
Yet to my weakness shall belong
Its victory, its power to do
All that your strength has done for you :
For who stands single at the goal
He aimed for, justifies his soul !
Learn then, of Those where we belong,
Which is the Weaker, which the Strong !
I, the inert one, gravitate
Towards the greater bulk and weight,
While you toil up on troubled wings
To the minority of things !

Advocatus Diaboli

Yet, let me say, lest I appear
To cast at you the covert sneer
You cast against the horns and hoof,—
Minority is no disproof :
Wisdom is not so strong and fleet
As never to have known defeat.
You cast it in the teeth of sin,
That Heaven's last trump is bound to win :
And he laughs best, so people say,
Who laughs the latest in the day.

You seek life : think you life is good,
The Tree of Knowledge fit for food ?
Then should you not have been content,
Since life was God's experiment,
To show him honour by competing,
And prove the pudding in the eating ?
But things, you say, have all gone wrong !
What ? has the Devil proved too strong ?
Was he not right, who held in scorn
The feast God set, to thrust his thorn
Into the sides of them that taste,
Bidding them from the banquet haste
For refuge under his large wings
From this conditional state of things ?

Conditional made absolute,
You, too, might relish fleshly fruit,
And gladly let your senses loose
To one long, luscious draught of juice,
Relieved to find Salvation meant
Old appetites made permanent !

Advocatus Diaboli

You aim at Heaven for goal and prize :
Yet it is out of hoodwinked eyes :
Blinkered you watch life's transient hour
Of withering leaf and falling flower,
Where fagged-out vices prowl and perch,
Jackals and vultures to the church !

The secret is, as I suspect,
Life's to attain, or to reject.
I taste, and say, upon the whole
I do not wish to have a soul.
You do not taste : yet take for text
'To be continued in our next !'

A Garden Enclosed

A GARDEN ENCLOSED.

DEEP in this garden, closely fenced
And wardered by a myriad eyes,
A world from time and space condensed,
Feast for the weary idler lies.

Here at his earth-works plain to see
Laborious toils the Roman ant ;
Greek-like the honey-laden bee
Mellifluous hangs from plant to plant.

The wary spider sports his thread
And devil-like receives his toll ;
And underground with buried head
Grubs old mortality the mole.

Here wisdom waits the idler's look :
The mind is free to roam or halt ;
The garden is my history book,
Its walls are my ancestral vault.

A book with fair devices strawed,
Lavish in rosemary and sage ;
Where all the margin-paths run broad
Around the decorative page.

A Garden Enclosed

Or, open to the skies, a vault
Where basking sunnily I lie,
And, negligent to Time's assault,
With foot in earth prepare to die.

As the Flocks for the Brooks

AS THE FLOCKS FOR THE BROOKS

As the flocks for the brooks,
As the river for the sea,
So mine eyes long for thy looks,
I for thee.

As the sun drinks up the dew,
As the fire burns up the coal,
So Love strikes through and through
To my soul.

My spirit wastes like smoke,
My body burns like fire ;
Denial was but cloak
To my desire.

Wherefore did strife seem good,
Or strength a goal to gain ?
When the fire came to the wood,
All was vain !

O Beloved, if thou get heat
By any pain in me,
Then is the pain most sweet :
Let it be !

As the Flocks for the Brooks

Only make this be true,
And plain that I may see :
As the sun draws up the dew
Draw thou me !

When far, feel thou me near !
When heavy of heart, oh, haste :—
Drain me to death, for fear
Lest I waste !

Lest, betwixt lip and lip
Of loves that thirst and cry,
The cup of offering slip,
And I die !

Love puts out Love's Dream

HOW LOVE PUTS OUT LOVE'S DREAM

WHEN thou art with me, then my heavy
brain

Puts off its traffic, and resumes its rest ;
And thought, which stood thine absence to
sustain,

Slacks its o'er-laboured head upon thy
breast.

For where thou art not fancy fills thy place,
And mind rears up a monument to thee ;
Since to have tidings of thy distant face
My brain must ever at such building be.

Then thou dost wrong, sweet love, to draw
so near,

If, coming, thou a second self dost slay ;
For I, at rest with looking on my dear,
Must let that ghostly other slip away ;
And thou, being with me, hast love's dream
undone ;
But, being absent, art increased by one.

A Cause that is past Pleading

OF A CAUSE THAT IS PAST PLEADING

O LOVE, who know'st my cry and all my
prayer,

Since my deep groaning is not hid from
thee,

Why should my breath so smite an empty air,
Or words so brand the fire which burns
in me?

Thou know'st: and be thou cruel, or be
thou kind,

Both ways most bound at thy dear feet I
fall:

For though I have not thee, thou hast my
mind,—

New prayer can give thee naught, nor
aught recall.

Oh, be not thou like those who at their ease
Observant of the player's pains do sit;

Or judges savage in their just decrees,
Who love the prayer, but love not grant-
ing it:

Nor be not like the gods—would have us
cry,

Demanding more, that they may more deny!

The Soul's Complaint

THE SOUL'S COMPLAINT OF LOVE'S ABSENCE

STRANGE children in my breast thine absence
breeds,
Fierce ghosts of love insatiable as fire,
That break my slumber with their hasty
greeds,
And rob my spirit of her clear desire.
And where I would not, there they lead my
feet ;
And what I wish not, therewith feast mine
eyes ;
Till to make bitter loneliness seem sweet
My flesh consents to what my soul
denies !

O, dear, pure vision of all love on earth,
Why tarriest thou from me in any land ?
Return and rid me of this monstrous birth :
On my racked senses lay thy healing
hand !
For, in my dreams, I give my faith the lie,
And shuddering wake and pray lest this
be I !

Of Grief Wasted

OF GRIEF WASTED

LOVE, if my too sad singing hurts thy pleasure,

Learn how thy too long absence loads my grief!

For if with words my sorrow I could measure,

I might bring home my love to thy belief.

But now an alien strange of speech it strayeth,

And all unwelcome breathes into thine ear

Its tale of Time, where Time his tread delayeth,

Fast rooted in the absence of my dear.

If by my will I could bid well be doing,

To win thy pleasure were my pleasure set:

Like leans to like: yet were I now not suing,

If love, by grieving, grieving could beget:

For this would be all Paradise to gain,

Could I but hear thy heart for mine complain.

Of Time Lost

OF TIME LOST

THY will hath worn the travelling face of
Time

And made his little moments seem an
age :

Lest his first promise should fly up to prime,
Thy silence round his wings becomes a
cage.

For thee his minstrel-sands have ceased
to run,

And mute upon the wheel his note of
noon ;

Since, by the word once given but straight
undone,

Thy lips have emptied his poor lips of
tune.

So hath my love lost Time for thy dear sake,
While thou hast never yet found Time
for me ;

Time that I wish to give thou wilt not take,
Nor even to my hopes grant Time to be.

But thy dear fame, if I might make my verse
Keep Time with thee, all ages should
rehearse.

Of Love's Freehold

OF LOVE'S FREEHOLD

WHILE I am warm, dear love, thine honours
live :

So long as tongue can build a home for
sound

To fill with thy repute, this will I give
That men may find thy name on holy
ground.

Since Love, which sent thee hither to be
loved,

Hath here set up his dwelling-place of
clay,

As walls to hold his word my use is proved :
I do but worship as he bids me say.

So this it is which gives my love its right,
And, though my want endures, maintains
my worth,—

Within this temple to set up thy light
And sound thee to the common ears of
earth :

Nor shalt thou lack that praise the gods
devise,

Till in this house of clay Love buried lies.

Powers of Air

POWERS OF AIR

DEATH, with viewless nets, a snare
Spreads in air, to catch my breath :
Every time I laugh or sing,
Through his web a breath breaks wing.
Then, where that shows torn, he takes
Other web and mends and makes ;
Till at last the time he spends
Bringeth fast his broken ends !

Love his viewless dart, despair,
Shoots in air to pierce my heart :
Every once that in my side
Beats my heart a dart goes wide.
Still with venom he anoints,
Each afresh a hundred points,
Still with art pursues his feat
To kill my heart upon its beat !

Breath and heart, at come and go,
Still combine to meet the foe.
Yet not long can breath be held,
Yet not long can heart be whole :
Death and Love will reach their goal,
Heart and breath surrender quelled :
Then they must to freedom fare—
Heart to dust, and breath to air !

Love cannot release the Lover

HOW LOVE CANNOT RELEASE THE LOVER

Oh, face of music, how canst thou be still,
Who art of melody the overflow?
Since running water when it moves must
trill
So from thy looks such harmony doth go
That, though thou wouldest, thou canst not
silent be ;
And, though thou wilt not, still thou
claspest me !

Ah, me ! though thou canst keep thy flesh
so fair
From touch of mine, thy beauty burns the
air
And smites a withering solstice in my face.
Fast though I run, I still must lose the race :
No solitude in all the world have I ;
Thy life, and not thy love, thou slay'st
me by.

But in the midmost slumber of thy soul
I, as a dream, may find my life made whole :

Love cannot release the Lover

For, though thou love me not, I must love
thee !

About thy wanderings I am wind, and
grass,

And stream ; without me nowhere canst
thou pass,

And nowhere rest, beloved, and I not be !

The Dream

THE DREAM

IN a fire that flew by night,
 My delight
Came and murmured over thee,
‘Dream of me, dream of me !’
In the stillness of thy room
Sleep took up her magic loom,
And with threads of slumbering fire
Wove desire across the gloom :
 Dream of me !

Soft airs of the burning south
 Touched thy mouth ;
Sweet sounds murmured over thee,
‘Dream of me, dream of me !’
All her fragrance to disclose,
At thy casement showered a rose ;
And a sudden splash of scent
Loosed into the darkness went,
On what errand---ah, who knows ?—
 Dream of me !

Hand-like, as the touch that stings
 Silver strings,
Even so came sleep on thee :
‘Dream of me, dream of me !’

The Dream

There for sign thine arms lay wide,
Soft thy lips the darkness tried,
Till the dream that on thee lit
Drew me to the midst of it,—
Drew me wholly to thy side.

Dream of me !

Rue

RUE

PART I

I

NEVER shall life clear utterance show
To melt the hearts of men :
Hark back three thousand years, and know
How tongues had labour then ;

When God, who gathers north and south
To marvel at His ways,
Opened of old the ass's mouth,
And filled it to His praise.

But when Love bowed His Body whole
To death, for the dark East,
Then hung before men's eyes a Soul
More dumb than any beast.

His lips, Who spake as no man spake,
Nothing at all availed :
They gave Him vinegar to take,
And wagged their heads and railed.

So ye, the seers, and ye that seek,
Fellows with Him must be :
Only the dumb of heart can speak,
Or the blind think they see.

Rue

II

LONG through the night the new-born lamb
Utters its first complaint ;
Close to the body of its dam
The cry goes low and faint :

Till, as a breath at dawn, this birth
Which bears a twilight's span
Shall pass, and let alone to earth
The sorry needs of man.

Now, ere the covering darkness yields,
Lie down, dear lamb, lie down :
Better to die here in the fields
Than yonder in the town ;

Where fast before the butchering knife
A dumb death thins the herd.
Oh, better now to part from life
While life seems worth a word !

Out on the downs the shepherds cry,
The silly sheep-dogs yelp :
Then, quickly ease my heart, and die,
Lest I should bring you help !

Rue

III

IF you must do the thing you fear,
I would I were the sin,
To knock against your heart, my dear,
Until you let me in !

To sleep with you, and wake with you,
Lie down with you, and rise,
And let you feel the sunshine through
My love upon your eyes.

Oh, many a time you may prevail
With God, and rise as white
As you lay down ; yet you shall fail
Some solitary night !

Then, lest the want outlive the will,
How well would serve a friend
To devil for your heart until
You meant the thing to end !

For then, my dear, if I were there,
I would not be your foe :
You need but breathe the faintest prayer,
And I would let you go.

Rue

IV

AMID this grave-strewn, flowerless place
A dead man prays in stone :
Worn with the weather, how the face
Looks like a mask of bone !

From praying feet to praying hands,
Prayer will not let him go :
Still patiently his face withstands
God's everlasting No.

For still to all the plea he gives
God's word long since was said :
And still the foolish faith outlives
The mercy which lies dead.

The praying stone wears down to dust ;
And every day that dies
It proffers with a piteous trust
The prayer that God denies.

Rue

v

DEAR love, when with a twofold mind
I pray for bitter grace,
And from my pit of torment find
Your breath upon my face,

And hear you without thought of fear
Bid me to guard you well,
And guide your footsteps to win clear—
When my feet walk in hell:

I wonder, how can God be glad
To hear men praise Him so,
Who makes His piteous earth so sad
A lot to undergo?

Or does He too dip Feet in fire,
And share the thirster's thirst;
And find in each poor heart's desire
His own which hungered first?

Rue

VI

WHAT know ye of the wounds of Christ,
Ye friends for whom He died?
For you at least the love sufficed,
When Love was crucified.

For you, whose feet He plucked from hell,
He perished not in vain :
For you, when that He died, He fell
That He might rise again.

I watch the wounds : for me how vain
The blood-drops from His side,
Poor God, Who perished in His pain,
Curst, spit upon, denied !

Little ye know the pangs He bore,
Ye friends whom Love forgave :
There was a bitterer wound He wore
For souls He could not save.

Rue

VII

You hear a blind man preach the light
Wherein he never dwelt,
Because his hands can handle right
The darkness that is felt.

O Face of Love, to which I kneel,
What likeness lies between
This touch of hands outstretched to heal,
These lips that cry 'unclean'?

But when these hands have hold on fire,
And these lips fire for breath,
And life goes down to its desire
In the red pit of death :

Then, clear of sight in that far place,
I may lift eyes above,
And see you looking in God's Face,
O face I used to love!

Rue

VIII

Two masks my fate reserves for me,
Whichever way I fare :
Then, must the easier mask not be
The better one to wear ?

For here indeed the mask fits well ;
But oh, the weary pact !
How I must mouth, and strut, and swell,
To while away the act !

But then, the ease to bitter breath,
The stay to wordy strife,
When I put on the mask of death,
And drop the mask of life !

And death will lay an easier grace
Than life around my head :
You will not understand my face
The better when I'm dead.

Rue

IX

You, the dear trouble of my days,
When life shall let me cease,
Turn once aside from kinder ways
And look upon my peace!

Let your feet rest upon my roof,
And for the love we bore,
Forgive the heart, so far aloof,
You cannot trouble more.

For, if the dead man had his will,
I doubt not he would rise,
And waste his soul in sorrow still
With looking on your eyes.

So come when you have lost your power,
And pardon my release:
And set your feet to rest an hour,
A seal upon my peace.

Rue

PART II

I

Now we are parted face from face
Each to a destined end,
I know that God shall find no trace
In you of me, your friend.

There where I trod the way was wide,
With room enough for two ;
And yet I put you from my side,
That God might look on you :

And I have bowed Him from His height
To take this gift of me,
That pure and holy for His sight
I left you utterly.

For single as the Heart of God,
My heart that loved you well
Died for you all the while I trod
The downward path to hell.

Rue

II

THOU breast of all bright things, thou
Earth,

Where I was lapped ere day
Drew me from darkness unto birth,
Fair mother of my clay,

Now night and day, where'er I go,
I seem to hear thee cry,
'O child, what hast thou learned to know
Of signs beneath the sky?'

And I bend down, and answer back,
'I learn there is no rest,
On sea or land, for those who lack
The covering of thy breast.'

Then she: 'What hast thou there, weak
heart,
That will not let thee free?'
'Dear grief, from which I cannot part,
And love too strong for me!

'And dearer to my heart than rest
This love that burns like fire;
And closer than your breast the breast
Of grief for lost desire!'

Rue

III

DARK to its nest the light has gone ;
An unseen force prevails,
And hands of storm lay hold upon
The rigging and the sails.

High heaves the heart of night, and loud
The water sobs and breaks,
And overhead one helmet-cloud
Its cap of darkness makes.

Strong wants whereto the welkin moves,
They are but waifs like me ;
And all a storm of severed loves
That strain across the sea !

Rue

IV

THE death-white horses crest and turn,
Their gleaming saddles glide :
Have I no senses to discern
The riders as they ride ?

O death-white horse, in this dark race
Outcresting all your crew,
With foaming flank, and furious pace,
Who is it rides on you ?

Nay, follow not so hard on me,
Who ride to death alone :
White horse, pace gently, lest I see
Your rider overthrown !

Rue

v

ACROSS these barren clods of clay
Whenever a wind blows,
Between them and the warmth of day,
Stir shadows of the rose.

There, while the roses dance in air
And light winds whisper round,
Below them shadows foot to share
A ghostly dance on ground.

How coldly feels that barren bed
Those motions of delight !
It cares not if the rose be red,
Or if the rose be white.

For be the roses white as snow,
Or be they red as shame,
With ghostly footprints to and fro
Their shadows walk the same.

‘Alas !’ complains the barren clod,
‘Their dance is never done :
And all their duty is to nod
Between me and the sun

Rue

VI

LIVING, I feel the feet that tread
My burial-plot of ground,
As if they grudged the tired dead
A sleep that is too sound.

Tread softly, you, and you, for I,—
Truly I know you not!
Leave, where the dead man has to lie,
The quiet of his lot.

But if, at crossing of love's ways,
Feet from a distant land
Stood now, where after many days
I shall come, not to stand;

Then there would grow a light above
This darkness of my breast,
And I should know the feet I love
Had touched my place of rest.

Rue

VII

How this sad place deserted grown
Speaks of an old despair :
In ghostly dints the weary stone
Is hollowed out with prayer ;

As if each day, where lips of dearth
Cried for a barren clod,
Some want had worn the face of earth,
Since not the Face of God.

Who knows in what dark anguish ailed
Yon soul of flesh and bone ?
The prayer, because the spirit failed,
Hath carved itself in stone.

O hollow stone, of hollow prayer
You make a weary jest :
For prayers that failed did earth prepare
This hollow place of rest ?

Rue

VIII

DEAR love, though here my rest is stone,
 No Bethel have I seen ;
In the thick darkness I alone
 At Peniel have been.

There, at that hour which bade us part,
 When flesh and courage failed,
Thine angel stood against my heart
 And wrestled and prevailed.

So let the Power which binds my will
 Now grant the wrestler's claim ;
Let that strong love be in me still
 Which makes my feet go lame !

Though on me life be like a rod
 Where blossom cannot be,
Thou art the fairest deed of God
 That I may hope to see.

But when the darkness riseth up,
 And I lie down in pain,
And all the mirk is like a cup
 For thirsty thought to drain :

Rue

Oh, then, dear vision of delight,
Beyond mine own control,
Thy darker angel comes by night
And tempts away my soul.

Rue

ix

Of old betwixt the gods and earth,
High-headed, girt with cloud,
Dividing misery and mirth,
Old Atlas stood and bowed.

Close to the high celestial gate
He bent a drowsy brain :
While far below his feet set weight
On furrowed fields of pain.

The earth's far cry sang faint, and dim
Her face toward him grew :
His head was crowned with light ; round
him
The immortal laughers flew.

And yet he tired of that high place,
And thrust away the prize :
Lifting a dead, indignant face
Of stone toward the skies.

Rue

x

HERE where the Rome of nations stands
On mounds of buried breath,
Sits one who holds in hollow hands
The keys of life and death.

Oh, heavy come the poor in heart,
And rich return they home ;
Since well performs his proper part
The middleman of Rome !

About the holy beaten ground
The nations on their knees
Hark, while with apostolic sound
Loud creak the golden keys.

And, though the hingeless doors be dumb,
With solemn hand and show
The porter lets the weak man come,
And lets the strong man go.

But while he spreads his lavish hands
Across the hill-tops seven,
Dark Angelo like Atlas stands
Dividing earth from Heaven.

Rue

XI

GREAT Mother, dwelling in the shade
Of altars, over glooms
Monastic, where long prayer is made
By dead men out of tombs,

Thou hearest how thy barren sons
Plead for a land despoiled
Of corn and oil and wine, where once
They at the vintage toiled :

Therefore, to cheer their hearts, send down,
Even to the lowest place,
Thy mother-word from that fair Town
Where loves come face to face.

Mid shadowing of celestial doves
Bring pity to the dead,
O Thou Madonna of the loves
Of hearts that could not wed !

But here, O Maiden of the East,
To me Thy voice is dumb ;
Unto that final gathering-feast
Look not for me to come ;

Rue

For I am bound to other marts
Where meagre are Love's doles,
And men lay by their broken hearts,
But not their broken souls.

Rue

xii

IN sackcloth shrouds they rise from rest ;
They pray from bleeding knees :—
Ah, Christ ! what grapes of love grow
pressed
Against the lips of these ?

Out of the smitten flesh and bone,
Old heats of earlier days,
A blood-red vintage fills with moan
The wine-press of Thy praise.

Which at Thy feast when lifted up
Before celestial eyes,
What ghosts out of the bloody cup,
What ghosts of men must rise !

Rue

xiii

THE Tree of Life on Judgment Day
Hears speak the poison-tree :
'Within my sap came death to stay
When life first looked on me.

'But from Thy boughs there went a
breath,
Thy shadow on me fell :
And nothing have I done for death,
Because I loved Thee well.

'So I was barren for Thy sake,
Though nothing else I did :
Here, Lord, as in a napkin take
The talent that I hid !

'Make Thine own usury, and shift
The burden of Thy breath ;
Have back again Thy heedless gift,
Who gavest life to Death !'

Rue

XIV

AGAINST my flesh Love hangs to die
As on the accursèd tree :
I am the rood where he lays by
His wronged humanity.

The wounds which pierce the hands of
Love,
Driven by the hands of hate,
Stand also in my flesh to prove
The bitterness of fate.

Here Love lies dying on my breast,
His godhead all laid by :
Soon shall he enter to his rest,
When, ah, no rest have I !

Rue

xv

THIS is the grave which year by year
Gives up its ghostly dead :
Of all poor graves least rest is here,
Where Love laid down his head !

The heart's desire of heart-sick lands
How shall men leave alone ?
Therefore they come with pious hands
And roll away the stone.

So year by year, as dawn brings gloom
To light, and earth waits dumb,
Uneasy from the open tomb
The ghostly Easters come.

Rue

PART III

I

O GHOSTLY dawn, that whitenest now
 The chilly-breathing earth,
This face of life why liftest thou,
 If death be brought to birth ?

Can there be any death to live,
 Or any life to die,
Unknown to me, that thou canst give
 To put my darkness by ?

Pale mother, from between thy feet
 Cometh a still-born day,
Where life and I can never meet
 Till light be put away.

Rue

II

PALE stranger, with the uplifted face
That seals its looks at me,
Come you to fill the empty place
Where Love was wont to be?

In your dull heart without alarms
If any love abide,
Reach up and take me in your arms
And draw me to your side!

Say else, by what deep purpose stayed,
To what diviner end,
Goes this defeat, where fate hath made
A stranger of my friend?

For I am like a withered brook
Which water runs not through,
Since Death hath laid a dear rebuke
On all my thoughts of you.

Rue

III

GHOSTS of sweet wants, ye touch and leave
An unresponsive breast !
Hearing you knock and go, I grieve,
But cannot give you rest.

Ye, while on earth the spring goes round,
Dear wants, can never die.
Now all my spring lies underground,
Therefore no wants have I !

Oh, fare ye well, and sup at life,
And find a better bed !
Here living is a weary strife
When all its wants are dead.

Rue

IV

Why dream for you, dear vanished friend,
The peace on earth denied,
Since life, to gain a broken end,
Has torn you from my side ?

The ramparts of the house of Death
Love cannot pierce or scale,
To tell with what a thirst for breath
The silent captives ail.

In that fixed prison-house of form,
All locked and barred about,
Perchance your living will is warm
And battles to be out !

Rue

v

Out of the heart of night a hand
Of darkness touched my side :
Light of my life, I saw you stand,
And dreamed you had not died.

‘Oh, you look weary, you look old,
And heavy hangs your head :
Come from the night and from the cold,
And creep into my bed !’

The Fates that leagued against us still
Had fallen apart in fear,
When warm to all my weary will
I thought to draw you near :

But my quick soul, to love denied,
Smote on its doors in pain :
‘Go back awhile, Beloved,’ it cried,
‘And die and come again !’

Rue

VI

THE Soul bereaved, the Flesh defiled,
Made strife with Love, and said,
'Lord, is not mine the living child?
And is not hers the dead?'

And while with piteous plea the two
At hard contention warred,
To search the holier anguish through
Up glanced the dreadful sword.

Then the sad Flesh, the far-defiled,
Caught at Love's Feet, and said,
'Give her, give her the living child!
And give me back the dead!'

'Dost thou believe the dead can rise,
O Flesh? Then see thy son!'
Love spake: and clear before her eyes
Living and dead were one!

Rue

VII

Out of the earth which holds you bound
All spring comes back to me ;
The honeyed world awakes at sound
Of life the quickening bee.

From the devourer comes forth meat,
And sweetness from the strong,
And honey from beneath my feet
Where you to earth belong.

O love, to you I bend and pray,
Who seeing, yet am blind,
Because I cannot put away
A dead face out of mind.

Through the dull mould of my desire
I search with hands that grope,
'Mid ashes of a buried fire,
For love, or faith, or hope.

So, lest I perish without end,
Having no wit to see,—
O ghost of all dead springs, O friend
Of Love, arise in me !

Rue

VIII

SPRING comes with silent rush of leaf
Across the earth, and cries,
'Lo, Love is risen!' But doubting Grief
Returns, 'If with mine eyes

I may not see the marks, nor reach
My hand into His side,
I will not hear your lips that preach
Love raised and glorified.

Except by all the wounds that brake
His heart, and marred His brow
Most grievously for sorrow's sake,
How shall I know Him now?'

Love came, and said, 'Reach hither, Grief,
Thy hand into My side,
Oh, slow of heart to win belief,
Seeing that for grief I died !

'Lo, all the griefs of which I died
Rise with Me from the dead.'

Then Grief drew near, and touched the side
And touched the wounds that bled,

Rue

And cried, 'My God, O blessed sign,
O Body raised, made whole,
Now do I know that Thou art mine,
Upholder of my soul!'

Rue

IX

ME did self-love or love most move,
Strong will or weak desire?
Or was love laid on me to prove
How ice may vanquish fire?

Nay, still my heart cannot undo,
My lips cannot unsay
That bitter need I had of you
And could not put away!

But life from death strange virtue draws
And, knit with new desire,
Still the love lives in me, though thaws
The ice, though faints the fire.

For life, which out of good or ill
Besought one kindred boon,
Here on death's wave how clear and still
The waters wash the moon!

Rue

x

THE Earth her troubled seasons brings,
Low at Love's feet she lays
The broken promise of her springs,
Her tarnished summer days :

And says of all, 'Not here the gift :
But out of all of these
Draw Thou, for one too weak to lift,
An offering to Thy knees !

' And gather out of all the storms
That flew to find them rest,
The loves that in a hundred forms
Have strained toward Thy breast ! '

Rue

XI

As by the motion of her arc
The moon draws up the sea,
So through the sense-defeating dark
Love's hold is laid on me ;

Till in the strife of hearts that yearn
A hidden goal to gain,
I touch the keys of life, and learn
The mysteries of pain ;

And find one law uplifted chief
All other laws above,
That Earth cannot contain its grief,
Nor Heaven contain its love.

There, when Love's moon unveils her
snow
On Paradisal trees,
Timed to her beating heart must go
The beat of far-off seas.

And led by ways of death or birth
To live again or die,
Fashioned from all the griefs of earth
All loves as kindred lie.

Rue

So, clear of sight from this far place
 Let me lift eyes above,
And see you looking in God's face,
 O face I used to love !

Love Importunate

LOVE IMPORTUNATE

DARK was the night, and dark as night my heart,

When at my chamber door there knocked a hand.

Then, with glad start,

I rose, and oped :

Nay, not the one I hoped,—

There Love Himself did stand.

Ah, me ! those eyes I could not meet for shame,—

So, downward looking, saw the Feet that bled ;

And knew He came,

Footsore and worn,

A Lover to man's scorn :—

Yet could not give Him bread !

Grieved, from His Feet I feared to lift mine eyes :

Patiently there He stood while I stayed dumb.

Till with sharp sighs

I cried, ' Oh, sweet,

Oh, fearful, bleeding Feet

Of Love, why are Ye come ? '

Love Importunate

'One welcome lacking ever must I roam,
And footsore needs must be,' my Lord confessed:

'From many a home
A wanderer still,
Because your stubborn will
Denies my Heart its rest.'

Sadly I owned, nought had I here to give:

Nay, not a bed so made that He might lie.
Could one not live
From Love shut fast,
But to one's door at last
He needs must come to die?

'Why, then,' quoth Love, 'didst thou so watch and wait?

Whom Love hath made, loveless can find no rest.

In empty state
Can peace have part?
Is not thy very heart
An inn that lacks a guest?'

'Yet there be other inns,' I sighed: 'fair boards

Where open hearts the feast for Thee prepare
Which peace accords!'

Love Importunate

‘Let it be so ;
That feast I will forego !’
Said Love. ‘Thou art My care.’

Ah, what He further spake I may not tell !
But in the very place, where once lay sin,
Love deigns to dwell ;
Nor may I doubt
The door which once shut out
Can closer shut Love in

Spikenard

SPIKENARD

As one who came with ointments sweet,
Abettors to her fleshly guilt,
And brake and poured them at Thy Feet,
And worshipped Thee with spikenard spilt:
So from a body full of blame,
And tongue too deeply versed in shame,
Do I pour speech upon Thy Name.
O Thou, if tongue may yet beseech,
Near to Thine awful Feet let reach
This broken spikenard of my speech !

Mystery of the Incarnation

THE MYSTERY OF THE INCARNATION

(A DISPUTATION BETWEEN CHRIST AND THE
HUMAN FORM)

COMESt Thou peaceably, O Lord ?
‘ Yea, I am Peace !
Be not so fearful to afford
Thy Maker room ! for I am the Reward
To which all generations of increase
Looking did never cease.

‘ Down from amid dark wings of storm
I set My Feet
To earth. Will not My earth grow warm
To feel her Maker take the form
He made ; when now, Creation’s purpose
meet,
Man’s body is to be God’s Mercy-seat ? ’

Lord, I am foul : there is no whole
Fair part in me
Where Thou canst deign to be !
This form is not Thy making, since it stole
Fruit from the bitter Tree.
‘ Yet still thou hast the griefs to give in toll
That I may test the sickness of man’s soul.’

Mystery of the Incarnation

Nay, Lord, my toil has lost its worth !

I am afraid,

Lest I should mar the blissful Birth.

Quoth Christ, 'Ere seas had shores, or earth
Foundations laid,

My Cross was made !'

'Nought canst thou do that was not willed
By Love to be,

To bring the Work to pass through Me.

No knee

Stiffens, or bends before My Sov'reignty,
But from the world's beginning hath fulfilled
Its choice betwixt the valleyed and the hilled.

For both, at one decree,
My Blood was spilled.'

Yet canst Thou wear these earth-worn
hands ?

'These hands,' quoth Christ,

'Of them I make My need :

Since they sufficed to forge the bands

Wherein I hunger, they shall sow the seed !

And with bread daily they shall feed

My Flesh till, bought and bound, It stands
A Sacrifice to bleed.'

Lord, let this house be swept and garnished
first !

For fear lest sin do there look in,

Mystery of the Incarnation

Let me shut fast the windows: lest Thou
thirst,
Make some pure inner well of waters burst:
For no sweet water can man's delving
win—
Earth is so curst!
Also bar up the door: Thou wilt do well
To dwell, whilst with us, anchorite in Thy
cell.

Christ said, 'Let be: leave wide
All ports to grief!
Here when I knock I will not be denied
The common lot of all that here abide;
Were I so blinded, I were blind in chief:
How should I see to bring the blind
relief?'

Wilt Thou so make Thy dwelling? Then I
fear
Man, after this, shall dread to enter here:
For all the inner courts will be so bright,
He shall be dazzled with excess of light,
And turn, and flee!

'But from his birth I will array him right,
And lay the temple open for his sight,
And say to help him, as I bid him see:
"This is for thee!"'

The Swaddling Bands

THE SWADDLING BANDS

O LOVE, when human sense first touched
Thine Eyes,
Bidding them tell Thee nought, save through
disguise
Of specious form, and close embodiment,
Seemed it not sad that life such darkness
lent,
While to Thy new-born Brain the wonder
grew
How earthly sight could so shut out the
Heavenly view?

For Thou from the embrace of Mary's heart
Must turn and see her play her earthly part:
Can that poor robe, and this poor peasant
face,
Cover the highly favoured, full of Grace?
And can this weary elder Thou dost see
The Heaven-taught Joseph be?
And in this cabin'd space
Of stable rock
Does not the whole world flock
To worship at Thy Knee?

The Swaddling Bands

Now, this first time, Thine Eyes must look
on walls :

Where Thy Hands cannot reach,
Hands stretch and do beseech ;

Where Thine Ear cannot hear, Thine earth
for succour calls !

O little Heart,
Beat fast, and grow !

The whole world's smart
Through Thee, one day, must flow.

O childish Ears, attend,
Being friend to all men's fears !

O childish Eyes,
Would Ye of man be wise,
Ye must the channel be to all men's
tears !

So wait, and learn Thy strict estate,
Until to Thee this earth commits her
fate !

Each day a little knowledge brings :
The shepherd's crook, the crown of
kings,

In time shall prove Thee great,
When Hand and Head bear up their awful
weight.

Now round Thee, Holy Child,
Life dawns in darkness mild :
Out in the star-eyed night a Herald sings
Of Nature reconciled.

The Swaddling Bands

Thou canst not see that Star, nor hear those
pastoral wings:
Yet first the shepherds come to gaze, and
then the kings.

Love, the Tempter

LOVE, THE TEMPTER

Oh, tempt not me ! I love too well this
snare
Of silken cords.

Nay, Love, the flesh is fair ;
So tempt not me ! This earth affords
Too much delight ;
Withdraw Thee from my sight,
Lest my weak soul break free
And throw me back to Thee !

Thy Face is all too marred. Nay, Love,
not I—

I did not that ! Doubtless Thou hadst to
die :

Others did faint for Thee ; but I faint not.
Only a little while hath sorrow got
The better of me now ; for Thou art grieved,
Thinking I need Thee ! Ah, Christ, lest
I fall

Weeping between Thy Feet, and give
Thee all :

Ah, Christ, lest love condemn me unre-
prieved

Into Thy bondage, be it not believed
That Thou hast need of *me* !

Love, the Tempter

Dost Thou not know
I never turned aside to mock Thy Woe ?
I had respect to Thy great love for men :
Why wilt Thou, then,
Question of each new lust—
‘Are these not ashes, and is this not
dust?’
Nay, Love, Thou hast not eyes
To see how sweet it is !
Each for himself be wise :
Mock not my bliss !
Ere Thou cam’st troubling, was I not
content ?
Because I pity Thee, and would be
glad
To go mine own way, and not leave
Thee sad,
Is all my comfort spent ?

Go Thine own ways, nor dream Thou
needest me !
Yet if, again, Thou on the bitter Tree
Wert hanging now, with none to succour
Thee
Or run to quench Thy sudden cry of
thirst,
Would not I be the first—
Ah, Love, the prize !—
To lift that cloud of suffering from Thine
Eyes ?

Love, the Tempter

O Christ, let be !

Stretch not Thine ever-pleading Hands thus wide,

Nor with imperious gesture touch Thy Side !
Past is Thy Calvary. By the Life that died,

Oh, tempt not me !

Nay, if Thou weepest, then must I weep too,
Sweet Tempter, Christ ! Yet what can *I* undo,

I, the undone, the undone,

To comfort Thee, God's Son ?

Oh, draw me near, and, for some lowest use,
That I may be

Lost and undone in Thee,

Me from mine own self loose !

Before Confession

BEFORE CONFESSION

As the foul flesh lays by the hindering robe,
Letting the water probe
 And purge each stain,
Till with that sweet medicinal receipt
From face to feet
 The body is made sane ;
So, from my shamefaced soul, do I aside
All covering lay (who have so long denied
Thy cleansing Power), to be purified.

Late though I come, at last
The dress I cast
 Of my deceit which hid, till late,
My soiled estate :
All that I did, I did in secrecy.
Lord, in my secret places cleanse Thou
 me !

As to the flesh laid bare, the water, led
By its own laws of life, bids cleansing spread
With subtle press and intimate caress :
And with compelling weight, doth gravitate
Round all which passively submits thereto,

Before Confession

Leaving untouched no part ;
So to my heart,
Stripped of itself, Thine utmost healing do !
So from its falsehood wash it with Thy
truth :
And from lust-loving lave it in Thy ruth :
And with pure Waters pitiful, whose art
The virtue brings of an inborn embrace,
Wash Thou the soil of shame from off my
face !

Against all outward secrecy I pray,
Let all such secrecy be put away !
Since Thou in all my secrets seest me,
Thine, not the world's, let all my secrets be !
So, in Thy secret Ear when they are named,
I shall be naked but yet not ashamed :
And my great gain be this dear privacy—
When I shut out the world, to shut in Thee !

The Penitent Thief on Calvary

TO THE PENITENT THIEF ON CALVARY

WHEN shame and darkness covered Him
and thee,

What didst thou see,

O thou great penitent of Calvary,
That thou couldst beg this boon as thy
reward

In anguish?—‘When Thou comest to
Thy Kingdom, Lord,

Remember me! ’

In that most darkest hour,

Of hatred born,

When Satan’s power

Showed Love held up to scorn,

What way

To thee came strength to pray?—

‘Lord, when Thy Kingdom cometh unto
Thee,

Remember me! ’

Above thy head the darkness did not rend

To kindle thought;

No healing sign was wrought

The Penitent Thief on Calvary

About that death-place of earth's dying
Friend,
To tell beholders, 'This is not the end !'
Thou through the veil
Didst gaze
Into the centre of all Time's amaze :
Thy tongue ere Easter greetings cried, 'All
Hail !'

O tongue, whereon such fires of faith were
found,
O most triumphant sound
Of prophecy that ever fell from man
Since Time began,
That, with its dying breath,
Hailed Life in death,
And named the Victor in the Victim
bound !

Therefore to thee,
Strong Saint, I make my plea :
Pray lest I tempt my fate !
Lest with a soul too dead,
Drawn down to my last bed,
I have not eyes to see
Beyond my own gross darkness cover-
ing me !
'Too late, too late,
For my sad soul's defence
Were death-bed penitence !

The Penitent Thief on Calvary

Only for thy clear soul that hour sufficed
To pierce the drift, and bid the darkness
lift ;
All we like thieves have stolen our days
from Christ,
And think with late avowal that guilt to
shift,
But at the last can bring no recompensing
gift.

O Light in a dark place,
Show not too fair a light !
Lest thy strong suppliant face
Draw weaker souls to night ;
And they, in their dark need,
Have no such light to plead.

Therefore my prayer to thee,
Pray thou for me,
Lest at the last
Self knowledge hold me fast
To sins I see !
So, while I draw strong breath,
Pray lest I, brought to death,
Die, and fall short of thee !

Easter Dawn

EASTER DAWN

MUCH to have lost and yet to find
New comfort with an open mind ;
Grief to have known, and yet to be
Clear-eyed to all felicity :
These are the wells of life which give
Day to a darkness fugitive.

Such must that Easter light have been
When dawn on Calvary was seen,
And sleepless women, soon astir,
Came weary to the sepulchre.
And, as they marked its light increase,
They must have marvelled how such
 peace
Could meet them on a day so sad ;—
For, surely then, they also had
A foretaste, earned by sweet accord,
In the fair triumph of their Lord.
So, by the wisdom sorrow gives,
One may have said—‘God’s goodness
 lives !
Yea, though the form in dust is laid,
His Love lives still : be not afraid !’

Easter Dawn

Then, as an echo to that word,
Angelic was the voice they heard,
Bidding them seek no more in vain
The Living where the dead had lain.
And, looking back through that bright air
About them, did they wonder where
He then might be ; and, with eyes dim,
Think the world void—not finding Him ?

Nay ! rather must they then have seen
His Presence where His Peace had been,
For joy of Him all heaven was blue ;
With news of Him the sparkling dew
Shot back a message to the sun ;
Eager, the wind began to run
With a like burden on its breath ;
And the lark sang, ‘ There is no death ! ’

And yet, beyond the shadowed hill,
There was the city sleeping still,
While from its blind walls girt about
The drowsy sentinels looked out,
And in the Temple on the height
The weary watchman quenched his light.
New Day was come ; old Night was gone ;
Yet in that city no light shone,
Save from the outer world what fell,
While men rose up to buy and sell.
And so through time the wonder goes
How Salem slept, and Christ arose !

Dedication

DEDICATION

WHEN I have ended, then I see
How far my words come short of Thee
Speech heavenly cannot live on earthly lips,
Pure thoughts borne down to language bear
eclipse.

Ah, Christ, what harmony will that be then,
When, in Thy likeness, all the thoughts of
men

Grow satisfied, in silence serving Thee
For now, 'tis difference that makes us be
Each clamorous his own meaning to express :
But then all minds will wear the marriage-
dress,
Moving in meet processional degree.

O Christ, come quick, and from the body
loose
The long distraction of each present use !
The hands that handle, and the lips that
taste
Not at Thy banquet, work but so much
waste,
And at sad lingering make heedless haste !

Dedication

Some day, when love of self hath lost its
lust

Of living in me, Thou wilt come, I trust,
And tread my heart to Paradisal dust:
Making me glad, ere sweet oblivion fall,
To know myself for nought, and Christ for
all in all.

